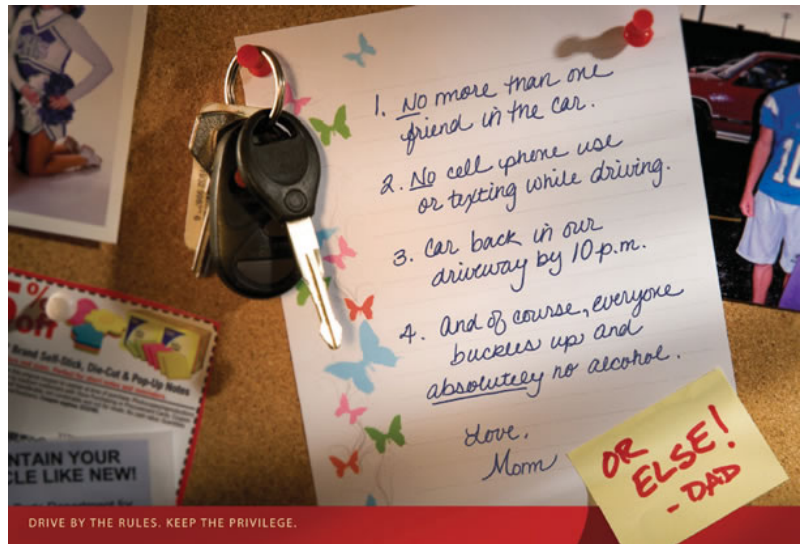


## Distracted Driving - Are you guilty?

Out on the road, driving requires a surprising amount of brain power and skill. We scan the road, intersections, parking lots, traffic signals, signs and ditches; and predict the actions of drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists and stray dogs while we coordinate precise movements of eyes, hands and feet.

We may not realize what we miss when our attention is elsewhere but the car keeps moving – a vehicle travels 103 feet in just one second at rural highway speeds of 70 mph.

- Have you ever slammed on your brakes because you didn't see the truck in front of you slowing down?
- Have you ever run a red light unintentionally?
- Have you ever arrived at your destination but you don't remember driving from place to place?



Experienced drivers automatically move their foot to the brake when they see a red light. Habits help them scan and recognize road hazards differently than new drivers. According to research by Don Fisher of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, newly licensed drivers can be up to six times less likely to look for potential hazards than more experienced drivers.

Focused attention and hazard recognition are essential when there is ice on the road, a curve in the dark or when a wheel drops off the edge of the road. Parents can help their teens develop smart driving habits through many miles and hours of supervised practice. Like in sports and music- competence, skill, judgment and good habits grow through experience.

Research shows teens drive like their parents. Avoid distractions that take your attention from the road – ask passengers to change the radio/CD, pull over to the side of the road to answer your cell phone or to remove that wasp flying inside the car.

Stays focused on driving and consider the example you set for your children, family and friends. Wear your seat belt and require all passengers to buckle up every trip and every time. Drive sober and remember to praise your teens when they show good judgment.

Inattention and speed too fast contribute to 82% of all 15 and 16 year old crash fatalities according to Montana statistics. A 15 year old driver is also seven times more likely to be in a crash than a driver between age 65 and 74. Just getting a driver license doesn't mean a teen is ready for all road and traffic conditions.

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